

well—perpetual high unemployment, an economy kind of in a death spiral that just kind of bumps along like ours, which is now bumping along at a 1.5-percent growth rate.

It is time to get serious about solving this problem. This “red” rises like a mountain over a relatively flat plain of green.

Now, I know there is almost an article of faith on the other side with some—maybe not all—that it is a revenue problem. Clearly, it is not a revenue problem. More to the point, tax revenue as a share of our gross domestic product is today about the same as it has been over the last four decades. Spending, on the other hand, averaged just 18.5 percent over that same period but today stands at about 23 percent of gross domestic product—one of the highest spending levels since World War II. It is about to get much worse, growing to nearly 40 percent of GDP in just a few decades—40 percent of GDP. There is simply no other way to solve this problem—no other way to solve the problem—than to get our spending under control.

A significant portion of the dramatic spending increase to come is the result of tens of millions of baby boomers reaching retirement age. We know this. Erskine Bowles, the Chairman of the Bowles-Simpson Commission, said it was the most predictable crisis in American history.

We are in a position to do something about this. We should. But that is only one part of the problem. It is the biggest part of the problem, but it is only one part of it. We need to shine a light into every corner of the budget, especially the dark corners that often evade real scrutiny. Programs that do not work should be scrapped, and when considering those that do, we still need to ask the question, Can it be done better, faster, more efficiently?

We need to root out waste, which will serve as the first real test of the Democrats’ seriousness in this debate. I mean, why is the Federal Government funding Chinese studies on pig manure—why—and research into the smoking habits of Jordanian college students and reality TV shows in India? Are our friends on the other side prepared to cut this kind of waste? Because if they are not, if they demand a 1-to-1 ratio between tax increases and pig manure cuts, then there is really no hope of ever putting our country back on the path to prosperity.

The Senate will soon begin consideration of H.R. 325. If it passes, we will have a few more months to come up with the kinds of spending reforms necessary to secure a longer extension of the debt ceiling. That extra time will give us a chance to break the Democrats’ other bad habit of leaving everything—literally everything—until the last minute. But we can only do it if we get to work now and return to what we call around here the regular order. Remember, regular order is how the Senate is supposed to function. Commit-

tees are supposed to be allowed to evaluate legislation. Amendments are supposed to be considered. The public is supposed to have a chance to scrutinize the proposals that are actually before us.

Look, I know that solving the debt challenge is not going to be easy. Putting our country on a sustainable fiscal and economic path is going to require both parties committing to serious spending reforms. But this is a challenge we must overcome. By doing the hard work today, we can avoid a European-style catastrophe tomorrow. By reforming the functions of government that no longer make sense in 2013, we can do more than just control spending, we can encourage private sector growth and job creation and finally get the economy back on its feet. And by ridding ourselves of this massive burden of debt, we can remove the greatest obstacle to recovery.

As I said yesterday, this is ultimately a conversation about growth and opportunity. It is not a conversation about austerity. It is one that Republicans are eager to have. For those who want to pretend our country does not have a spending problem, this is a pretense which is not borne out by the facts. Now is the time to face reality. We have known this for literally years. When are we going to face it? There is no better time than now.

We can take on this challenge together if both sides are ready to do the necessary work to reform spending, but we need to get started today—not next week, not in April—today.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 2 hours, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the majority controlling the first half.

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I am delighted to see the Presiding Officer in that seat. I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 20 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ECONOMIC MELTDOWN

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I actually came to speak on another subject, but I had the opportunity to hear the minority leader’s remarks as I was waiting to speak. I would point out in response that our friends on the other side love to char-

acterize the spending that has taken place in recent years as something that was the will and choice and desire of President Obama. What they fail to recall is that during that period, we actually had an economic meltdown. Most Americans remember that economic meltdown. States such as Rhode Island are still in the aftermath of that economic meltdown—an economic meltdown, by the way, that occurred at the end of the last Republican administration and was caused by those policies.

The economic meltdown was relatively global. We have very practical examples of countries that went the path of spending cuts that the Republicans recommend—recommended through the whole economic meltdown. Just take a tour of Europe and you will see where the austerity plan was followed, the results have been far worse: lower GDP growth, higher unemployment. We are actually struggling through better in America by understanding that when the economy is collapsing, if the Federal Government withdraws even more money from it, it just collapses faster and you postpone the period of growth and recovery.

This business us only having a spending problem—well, you can look at the revenues as adequate, but it depends what you are measuring it against. If you are measuring revenues against the times when we had a balanced budget, it has always averaged 20 percent. It averaged around 20 percent of GDP. We are at 16 percent right now. This is a huge gap. If we drop and try to balance the budget, which is what I think we would like to achieve at 16 percent, we are going back to the social conditions of the early 1950s, conditions where many seniors still lived in poverty. I know the party on the other side likes looking back, but I do not think they want to look back to that. I really do not think most Americans want to live in a country in which that is the case.

So, do we have a spending problem? Yes, of course, we do. But when revenues are at 16 percent of GDP and we have never balanced the budget in recent history at 16 percent of GDP—in recent history, it has always been with revenues around 20 percent of GDP.

When you have these unbelievable revenue giveaways to special interests—Big Oil getting these huge subsidies, hedge fund managers paying these favored low tax rates, tax rates lower than their chauffeurs and their doormen and their maids pay—the Tax Code is riddled with those kinds of special interest giveaways, and if we can bring some of that back into the equation, not only does that add revenue and move us better toward the goal of a balanced budget and a reduced deficit but, frankly, in most of those cases, it is the right thing to do all on its own. It is the fair thing to do all on its own.

Yes, there are things that are idiotic buried away in the Federal budget. I am not here to defend studies about pig manure or reality TV shows. But the